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courage is contagious

Viewing cable 09ASHGABAT370, TURKMENISTAN: IRANIANS TRAVEL EN MASSE TO ASHGABAT

If you are new to these pages, please read an introduction on the [structure of a cable](#) as well as how to [discuss them](#) with others. See also the [FAQs](#)

Understanding cables

Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

To understand the justification used for the classification of each cable, please use this [WikiSource](#) article as reference.

Discussing cables

If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. **#09ASHGABAT370**.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
09ASHGABAT370	2009-03-23 14:46	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Ashgabat

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2011/04/17/112290/state-department-cables-reveal.html>

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RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 3211
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RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 000370

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/IR; STATE FOR SCA/CEN

Classified By: DCM Sylvia Reed Curran. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (SBU) Hundreds of Iranian tourists from the northern city of Mashhad have arrived in Ashgabat to spend part or all of the Nowruz holidays. Most made the 140-mile trip from Iran's second largest city by bus as part of one of several organized tour groups and are staying at the city's moderately-priced hotels. Despite cold and rainy weather for much of their stay, they were out shopping and enjoying what they reported as very advantageous prices for clothing and other goods as compared to Iran. Iran Watcher chatted with several families staying at the Ak Altyn Hotel in Ashgabat yesterday: One family, smiling and relaxed, and reported that it was their second time celebrating Nowruz in Turkmenistan. The family members said they particularly enjoyed the break from the bustle, traffic, and "pressures" of Iran. With the exception of two elderly women sporting headscarves, none of the women in the group were veiled. They commented that it was a relief to be free from that and other restrictions for a few days.

BORDER HASSLES

¶2. (C) Sepideh, a housewife in her late thirties traveling with her husband, mother and two children, said that although the road trip from Mashhad to the Bajgyran border took only three hours, the Turkmen border authorities had given the group "a very hard time" at the border, questioning them and checking documents for more than six hours. Notwithstanding that delay (her group reached Bajgyran, 30 kilometers from Ashgabat, at 10:30 a.m. last Wednesday, but did not get to Ashgabat until five p.m.), she said that she finds Ashgabat was a "wonderful" place to celebrate the Iranian New Year. In the hotel lobby, her mother and several members of the group modeled shoes, cardigans, and other bargains they found on a shopping excursion that morning.

VIEWS OF AMERICA

¶3. (C) Vahid, Sepideh's husband, a thoughtful, soft-spoken businessman in his mid-forties, said that Iranians were "excited and overjoyed" at President Obama's election in November, because in their view, the election of an African-American to the U.S. presidency was "undeniable evidence of the freedom that exists in America." Although Vahid had not yet heard President Obama's Nowruz message as they were in Ashgabat when it was broadcast, he had heard of it and said that he was hopeful that relations between the United States and Iran will improve soon. He cautioned, however, that many people in Iran, while they feel very favorable towards the United States, actually oppose a warming of relations. As they see it, he offered, a warming now would lend legitimacy to the Iranian regime, and give it more "staying power." He said that Iranians in general favor a withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq. Likewise, another member of the traveling party said that, "90% of Iranians love America," noting that "the other 10% don't know anything about it."

ELECTION PROSPECTS

¶4. (C) Describing President Ahmadinejad as "universally disliked," XXXXXXXXXXXX said that with the announcement that former President Khatami had withdrawn his candidacy for the presidency, Iranians are now pinning their hopes on former Prime Minister Mir Hussein Musavi. When asked who he expects will prevail in the election, however, XXXXXXXXXXXX was less certain. He said, "even if Musavi wins the most votes, the government could always reverse the results." He went on to note the "great divide between the Iranian people and the Iranian government," such as on the requirement for women to wear the hijab and on many other social issues.

15. (C) COMMENT: The visitors we spoke with were warm and engaging. Unlike many Iranians who visit Turkmenistan, they appeared unconcerned about the presence of hotel security personnel in the vicinity and shared their views openly. As they parted company, they told Iran Watcher of their delight at meeting an American who speaks Farsi. END COMMENT.

MILES